

Collaborative Inquiry:
Challenging Inequities to Improve ORAEYC Involvement
ORAEYC Equity Grant 2020-21

Inquiries: Sara Stearns (sara@oraeyc.org)

Website: oraeyc.org

Summary

ORAEYC received a \$10,000 grant from NAEYC to further our equity driven mission and increase the engagement of a diverse population of early learning educators in Oregon. Specifically, this grant will fund a study focused on BIPOC early learning educators, two Communities of Practice (BIPOC and White Ally), and ultimately result in the reinstatement of an Equity Committee for the organization. These projects are being led by an Equity Grant Steering Committee. This committee has a total of 15 individuals who work within the early learning field. Of the committee, some roles held are Child Care Resource and Referral staff, Portland State University faculty and students, professional development leadership, and educators.

ORAEYC Equity Study

The purpose of the study is to understand how the experiences of people of color and vulnerable communities are impacted in white dominant organizations and programs, so that we are able to create institutional change. Throughout the study, ORAEYC will gather information pertaining to lived experiences, in order to break down barriers and access to advocacy efforts, professional development, and engagement with the organization. ORAEYC hopes to increase membership of BIPOC individuals and be more reflective of Oregon's early learning workforce. Additionally, we would like to learn how we can transform our professional development opportunities to be inclusive and culturally relevant.

The methodology for the study is designed similar to a participatory action research model. The research question we desire to answer: Which elements can make ORAEYC an organization where BIPOC communities can find a sense of belonging?

Stories from 100+ BIPOC participants will be collected through a series of engagements- a survey, a focus group, and individual interviews. Once analysis of the contributions has occurred, all participants will be invited to participate in an overview of commonalities in the

conversations, identified barriers, identified positive outcomes, and expected change efforts that ORAEYC is committed to. The participant process is as described below:

1. Individual shows interested in participating in the study by completing an interest form.
2. ORAEYC emails the selected individuals to participate in an online survey.
3. Participants will then be grouped by language and/or other demographics to participate in a 1.5-hour focus group discussion.
4. If chosen and willing, a participant may be asked to complete a follow-up individualized interview for further story-telling.

ORAEYC Communities of Practice

Instituting the Communities of Practice (CoP) will provide an opportunity for educators to engage in open, honest dialogue surrounding race, equity and diversity. These conversations will be relevant to the work educators are committed to in early childhood education, thus leading to sustained knowledge and skills that benefit children and families in their programs. The CoP's are designed to inspire educators to change the way they think and/or teach, with an equity driven focus, to meet the needs of the communities they are serving.

The Communities of Practices designed by ORAEYC will follow a methodology of real-life knowledge sharing through conversation, resource exploring, and applicability of gained knowledge within the CoP setting. Interested individuals can sign up to attend the CoP's on the ORAEYC website, and will receive resources that will be explored in their desired group. There will be two CoP's available:

1. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), will focus on *Don't Look Away: Embracing Anti-Bias Classrooms* to close the opportunity gap for children from marginalized communities.
2. White Ally Toolkit, to build skills among White early learning educators to combat racism

ORAEYC Equity Committee

Reinstatement of the Equity Committee of practice will create a collaborative approach to ensuring that ORAEYC is using an equity lens. This committee will design an equity work plan to grow new partnerships, inform best practices, and improve equitable decision-making.

ORAEYC will actively recruit individuals who participated in the Equity Steering Committee, BIPOC educator study, or new members to commit to the Equity Committee. This group will be identified beginning in Fall 2021, and will inform an equity lens on ORAEYC decision-making.

In Closing

Several years in a row, ORAEYC has committed to become a High Performing Inclusive Organization. We believe that by defining and understanding diversity, we acknowledge and honor all personal life experiences and perspectives. With the Equity Grant projects stated above, we are furthering outreach and strategically dismantling institutional racism that may be present in our organization. Our direct collaboration with BIPOC educators will increase our learning opportunities and lessen our blindspots, so we can become even more inclusive and welcoming to all who are interested in engaging with us.